

**Child Welfare Services and Promoting Safe and Stable Families Reauthorization  
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Michigan Department of Human Services  
Children's Services Administration  
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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Steve Yager and I am Deputy Director of Children's Services at the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today on child welfare reauthorization, specifically the Child Welfare Services program and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program.

Caseworker Visit Funding

Michigan has seen our rate of caseworker visits improve dramatically through the use of the funding. Our baseline in 2007 showed 14% of caseworkers achieving a monthly visit with each child. In 2010, that rate increased to more than 70%. We continue to aggressively pursue training for our public and private caseworkers, courts and foster and resource families so not only will our rate of visitation improve to 90% by the end of fiscal 2011, but also our quality will improve. Additionally, we are heavily investing in mobile technologies to assist our caseworkers while in the field. The reauthorization and extension of the caseworker visit funding will support our initiatives to continue improvement in the rate and quality of home visits, which we believe has greatly improved child safety and has promoted placement stability.

While Michigan has not been required to pay a penalty for failure to achieve our stated goals, we would argue that assessing a penalty is counterproductive to achieving the goals of enhanced visitation. Michigan is not alone in the fiscal crisis that many states are facing. We acknowledge the penalty structure is considerably less than that applied to the Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement process. Any penalty in these trying fiscal times, however, takes a very real toll in the services we are able to provide to the children and families in the foster care system.

Michigan would like to see the additional IV-B (2) funds dedicated for improving the rate and quality of caseworker visits extended under the Promoting Safe and Stable Families reauthorization.

Substance Abuse Services for Caregivers

Michigan sees this as a continued area of need. There are several models available; however Michigan has not had the resources to develop anything on a statewide basis. Family drug courts and recovery coaches have proven effective. Michigan would advocate for additional funding for family drug courts and specialized Department of Human Services workers to coordinate/monitor the cases that are in drug courts.

### Coordination of Medical Care for Foster Youth

Michigan's use of Foster Care Transitional Medicaid (FCTMA) has improved from 33.8% to 65.4% in the last 18 months. This Medicaid program is not intended for every youth exiting foster care, with some youth acting as parents and therefore receiving Medicaid under a different program.. A total of 86.3% of youth exiting Michigan foster care were enrolled in a Medicaid program at the end of April 2011.

### Data Driven Decision Making

Michigan's data driven decision making initiative began out of necessity. Our goal as been to provide central administration and local office management and staff with the reports necessary to increase positive outcomes for the children and families served in child protective services, foster care, licensing, adoption and juvenile justice programs. The philosophy is to provide the field with data reports so they have the knowledge needed to manage the workforce and focus on the key areas of practice that have been shown to increase child safety, permanency and well-being. In addition, the data reports provide central administration executives with the ability to view county performance in the same areas of practice in a summary and graph format. The reports have consistent formatting and allow a quick comparison of performance at each reporting level within the county and statewide to ascertain the consistency of standards.

Key areas of practice across programs were identified as:

- Visitation Standards: reports that outline the required visits with children and families and whether they are being completed.
- Case Service Plans: reports that indicate timeliness of case service plan completion and review of service plans by supervisors.
- Placement and Permanency: reports that indicate foster care placement stability, length of time to reunification and adoption, length of time for licensure and timeliness of foster care placement home studies.
- Medical Standards: reports that outline the required medical and dental care for children in foster care and whether they are being completed.
- Data Quality and Timeliness: reports that pinpoint data entry errors, delays or performance issues.

To ensure usability of the reports, case management staff are currently conducting user acceptance testing as the reports are developed and prior to their release to a production environment. Reports are accessed in InfoView software that allows multiple users, configurable time frames and other specific criteria for the reports. Once implemented, baseline performance of counties and the state can be determined and goals will be set to improve performance over time. Michigan expects full implementation of the initiative this fall.

### Audit Processes

Michigan recommends that all federal processes be streamlined and linked so the frequent intrusions and required corrective action plans resulting from the myriad reporting and review requirements are eliminated. For a state like ours, that is also operating under federal court consent decree, writing the reports measuring data in subtle but different manners for each process and then participating in federal reviews and program enhancement activities leaves us with little time to work on implementing meaningful change.

From 2008 to 2010, Michigan underwent a Title IV-E Review, the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) statewide assessment and onsite review, the CFSR Program Improvement Plan, the Title IV-E Departmental Appeals Board litigation, the Children's Rights lawsuit, a SACWIS onsite review and other federal reviews on the public assistance operations of the department. We do not object to oversight but to the seemingly constant nature of that oversight. Michigan wants strong accountability in the operation of child welfare programs, but these divergent reviews and monitoring processes are too numerous to be value added, particularly to the staff responsible for providing services to families. In an effort to ensure Michigan's compliance with the numerous requirements associated with federal review processes, we created a Federal Compliance Division within the Department of Human Services' Children's Services Administration. This division is responsible for state plan maintenance and ongoing activities associated with the multiple federal audit processes.

Michigan recommends the current federal review and planning processes for the Child and Family Services Review and Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) be blended into an integrated state planning process. The proposal proffered by the American Public Human Services Association and the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators establishes both the manner in which this could occur and the rationale for coordination.

The proposal recommends a modified CFSR target of no more than three key practice areas. A state would be held accountable for its efforts to achieve sustainable improvement in those targeted areas. Assessment, data and continuous quality improvement activities form the basis of these activities. This proposal would employ qualitative data from the state's case review system, giving the review a "real time" value instead of the historical AFCARS and NCANDS data profiles employed in the current CFSR process.

Another argument for implementation of the coordinated process is the proposal for ongoing technical assistance by the Children's Bureau. The role of this technical assistance is identified as being consultative and instructive as states modify their processes. By comparison, the current CFSR is focused on identifying weaknesses and the dictating process-driven correction through the Program Improvement Plan (PIP). While the PIP includes many activities occurring over the two years of implementation, it often becomes a plan for the Children's Bureau, not for the state.

Under the coordinated plan, states could more readily adapt to changes in funding, legislative focus, program operation and external influences, essentially becoming more nimble in response

to these changes. Currently, the two-year PIP period is counterintuitive to how child welfare really operates and renegotiation is required for any modifications.

Combining the CFSR and the CFSP processes would allow for continuous implementation of the plans and continuous monitoring of goal achievement. For Michigan, the ability to establish a five-year plan that we self-monitor through data and reporting would aid us in adapting to the ever-changing face of child welfare service delivery. The current Child and Family Services Review process prescribes rather than evaluates. By refining the federal processes, states could be more creative and experimental in service delivery and have the support to evaluate child outcomes and related processes.

With respect to commonality of data, we agree that national data standards need to be established. However, the Child and Family Services Review data profile and measurement processes confuse external stakeholders, caseworkers, other agency partners, and the consumer community, including the legislature and the press. That no state has achieved every CFSR outcome is not reported to the public. Instead, the public hears that their state child welfare system failed the federal review. Child welfare systems receive unjustified bad press when the process itself is flawed. The process unjustly contributes to public disdain for our work.

The states should have more control over their individual processes. Michigan recommends using longitudinal data to assess our performance, rather than comparing our performance to other states. While the CFSR attempts to measure performance across multiple years and among 50 states, longitudinal data lends to constant monitoring and assessment more easily than the national standards. Using case and county specific data is critical to improve our system. Longitudinal data modeling has a higher degree of reliability and we are able to more quickly assess the impact of changes to the policies and processes we implement.

Another key component in any redesign is an external review process that augments internal quality assurance efforts. In Michigan, the State Court Administrative Office operates the Foster Care Review Board program that targets key components found in permanency outcomes. The annual report of this program regularly pinpoints the department's operational weaknesses in assuring safety, permanency and well-being. The process is much like the CFSR; highly-qualified staff and well-trained citizen volunteers review individual cases and interview families, children, foster parents and stakeholders to identify areas of concern. Because they are external to the department, they have no institutional bias and are able to provide recommendations for improvement. This external review is critical to development of our quality assurance system.

Blending the external review processes with state quality assurance systems and using longitudinal data is an ideal way to manage programs, identify barriers, enhance improvement and manage for results. We believe the Children's Bureau, through technical assistance, can enable states to develop a more effective state-based system that could suffice as a federal review process.